

## Ukraine Alert:

# Recovery after de-occupation

Since March 2022, different communities and territories in Ukraine have been liberated after various periods of occupation by the Russian Armed Forces. The Ukrainian Association for Middle Eastern Studies (AMES) has developed '[The "Road Map" for De-occupied Communities](#)' to help public and social actors prepare for the challenges of de-occupation. This policy alert connects the recommendations formulated by AMES to NATO's Protection of Civilians framework to enable Ukraine's international supporters to apply important lessons learnt in their support of the country.

### Key recommendations for external actors:

1. **Plan and act in a context-specific way. Each community has different experiences, assets and needs, which means that a tailored approach will increase the chances of successful recovery.**
2. **Return the community's agency, ownership and dignity during all phases of recovery.**
3. **Restore and strengthen social cohesion in a community. For this, consider the community as a whole; no group should be supported in isolation of the needs of the whole community.**
4. **Restore local democratic culture, practices and the social contract as much as possible. Local actors (institutions and civil society groups) and citizens' initiatives should always have a central role, including in initiatives implemented and supported by external actors.**

Work with de-occupied communities can be divided into three phases, each with specific goals. Understanding the exact stage the community is at during each phase can help determine priority activities for its restoration.

## Phase 1: Immediate response

Immediately after the Russian Armed Forces leave, the community returns to 'Ukrainian society'. The goals during this phase are to **respond to the most urgent needs** of the community and to create conditions to move towards the second stage.

In this early stage it can be difficult, if not impossible, to meet all needs in a coordinated and systemic way. Aid is usually provided by different actors in an unstructured way. How aid is provided is related less to the needs of the community than to the capacity of the military, volunteers and organisations bringing it in. Initial efforts are about survival and the **provision of emergency humanitarian aid**, quickly moving to the coordination of aid and security. This phase should be as short as possible – preferably weeks. The four things most important at this stage are: restoring **physical security**, organising **access** to the area, **information and coordination**, and **recording war crimes**.

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- 1. Restoring physical security** is the first priority: providing emergency **medical care, drinking water and food, evacuating people, and demining** roads to restore contact and communication. The military is usually the main actor in these activities, but local authorities and volunteers often participate in providing urgent support and should take over most of these tasks as soon as possible. There may also be a need for the removal, registration and storage of **mortal remains** to prevent the spread of disease, as well as to mitigate the trauma of relatives. Until law enforcement agencies are functioning, the military may be responsible for law and order, although crime rates are generally low immediately after de-occupation.
- 2. Access to the area** should be organised: for the military, volunteers and civil society, as well as for the local population (both in and returning to the area). The regional administration is usually responsible for this task. It should set **clear rules for access** (who, how, when) and may also need to apply some restrictions (curfews, roadblocks, checks), as some (pro-)Russian actors may stay behind to act as spoilers.
- 3. The collection of information and coordination** are needed to plan the initial response post-liberation. Ideally, this is already started during occupation and active fighting in order to prepare and coordinate the humanitarian response.<sup>1</sup> Once an area is liberated, actors coming in should look for **contact persons** in the community through whom they can better understand the community's needs, coordinate activities, and receive feedback. Information needs to be collected on: damage to infrastructure; the current number of residents (preferably per neighbourhood); their most pressing needs; potential environmental hazards (e.g., pollution generated by damage to industrial sites); and available humanitarian resources. All actors who deliver emergency aid should communicate, share information and coordinate efforts so that there is no accumulation of the same aid in one place or lack of aid in another.
- 4. The recording of war crimes** should start immediately after liberation. This includes the collection of forensic evidence and testimonies to enable legal procedures as well as to mitigate trauma. All actors involved in the recording of testimonies (e.g., members of the Security Service of Ukraine and staff of human rights organisations) should adopt a trauma-sensitive approach. Ideally, all involved in collecting testimonies should be trained on the minimal requirements for testimonies to be valid in court. There may be a need for specialised units trained in responding to **conflict-related sexual violence** (CRSV), including how to collect testimonies and evidence.

The **coordination centre** in Kharkiv is a good example of how the activities of different actors can be coordinated. This centre was run by the Regional Military Administration and provided day passes and coordinated the **exchange of information** on needs, opportunities and events in the area.

*In NATO policy, this phase would see the primacy of what the Alliance refers to as the Facilitating Access to Basic Needs (FABN) lens,<sup>2</sup> in which humanitarian actors and first responders play a lead role and the military a supporting one, creating the conditions for essential access by establishing an adequate security and logistics environment that enables the timely delivery of essential goods and services. Here the most important tasks of the military are:*

- *Demining and removal of unexploded ordnances as well as any improvised explosive devices.*
- *Removal of rubble and other obstacles to access and freedom of movement.*
- *Evaluation of damage to buildings and critical infrastructure: ensuring that damaged buildings and structures do not pose a risk to civilians, as well as listing and prioritising which structures need to be repaired first.*

## Phase 2: Transition

*After immediate needs have been met, the second phase is about **restoring human security**. The aim of this phase is to enable a community to start resuming 'normal' life.*

People from a community that has been liberated need a sense of security in order to return and function. This involves the **return of institutions and services**, such as the police, hospitals, banks, communication and state emergency services. It also requires **law and order**. In this phase, the

<sup>1</sup> This can be done by ensuring that military and civilians who have left an area are de-briefed by way of a quick interview to collect up-to-date information on a settlement/community. Space-based imagery and commercial drones can be used to begin to assess the damage, particularly to critical infrastructure (i.e., road and rail networks, energy and water treatment plants, etc.), as well as to identify potential mass grave sites and civilian casualties.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 5 of NATO's Protection of Civilians ACO Handbook (<https://shape.nato.int/documentation/protection-of-civilians-aco-handbook-.aspx>).

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provision of **humanitarian aid** should become **systematic** and targeted; uncoordinated and chaotic aid distribution is to be avoided. In addition, decisions about what aid is provided should take into account the **context** and **needs**. This phase is important for re-establishing the social contract and strengthening social cohesion.

1. The **visible return of institutions** is crucial at this stage, with some of the most important ones being the police, state emergency services, hospitals, banks, and payment facilities. Equally important for a sense of security is the **predictability and availability of necessary services**, such as mobile communication, the Internet, and the ability to withdraw cash or pay by card. This creates an environment for the **return of entrepreneurs and specialists** who can provide appropriate services to the community. The presence of **police on the streets** creates a sense of security. Until such security can be provided by the police and local government, Territorial Defence Forces (Ukraine's military reserve) can be deployed at important facilities (such as gas stations, banks/ATMs, and shops, etc.).

**Taking into account context and needs:** When people receive aid that is not relevant to them, such as unfamiliar food or items for children in a community without children, it erodes trust precisely where trust needs to be rebuilt. When humanitarian aid only reaches the most 'active' recipients – those able and willing to search and queue for aid – it creates a sense of injustice and decreases social cohesion. It can also draw crowds waiting for aid distribution, which are a potential target for enemy shelling.

2. Part of this, and perhaps a prerequisite, is the restoration of **communication and information infrastructure**, including the full restoration of television, radio and printed media. The liberated community must return to the **Ukrainian information context**. The information provided should include national as well as purely local information such as where to get aid, electricity/water outage schedules, restoration work, and daily updates on areas not yet considered safe due to ongoing demining, environmental risks or compromised structures. As well as enabling people in the community to communicate and function, the restoration of communication and information infrastructure allows businesses to operate and government services to restart.

3. In phase two, it becomes possible to check the information collected and **collect additional data** about the needs of individual residents and the community as a whole. Eventually, this information

should include all damage and destruction to property and infrastructure, although collecting such data will continue long after phase two is completed. Local authorities and the Military Administration play the main role in this, but it is key that the **community is involved in prioritising needs and solutions**. A consolidated list of community needs for recovery should be created to help avoid duplication or the omission of specific needs, as well as to strengthen the social contract. This information should be used to coordinate the delivery of aid and prioritise tasks for reconstruction and recovery.

4. The **systematic distribution** of humanitarian aid (on a certain day, at a certain time, or of a certain amount in a certain place), connected to the context and needs of a community, creates a sense of predictability and safety.<sup>3</sup> This can best be done by:

- paying maximum attention to the gathering of information about the needs of the community
- facilitating strong coordination, for example, by using a humanitarian hub (see box)
- operating through organisations that are permanently present in the area, as these are much more effective than those only visiting
- **decentralising activities** to enhance coverage: responsibility for certain groups or locations can be divided among different actors (e.g., religious organisations, public organisations, associations, socially responsible businesses).

5. Measures should be taken to help community members regain a sense of **dignity** and **control** over their lives. After immediate needs are met, **cash grants** should be introduced and in-kind humanitarian aid phased out, as

**Humanitarian hubs** have proven to be an effective way of ensuring strong coordination. A humanitarian hub is a place where humanitarian aid from different organisations can be collected and directed for coordinated distribution. These hubs should be set up locally. Schools and administrative institutions are well suited for this. To ensure the equal distribution of aid and avoid crowds gathering, local self-organisation groups (such as neighbourhood guard groups) can collect and deliver aid directly to people in their area to ensure that the sick, injured and elderly also receive aid.

<sup>3</sup> Note, if risk of shelling is a concern, predictability runs counter to mitigating the risk of physical harm, as it will facilitate the planning and execution of shelling. Changing the location could mitigate this risk.

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the availability of a large number of goods for free can become an obstacle to recovery. Cash grants can also create opportunities for people to earn money, such as through **public works** or volunteering to provide assistance to less mobile members of the community. The involvement of the community in all its diversity in setting priorities for recovery is an important part of strengthening agency and restoring dignity.

- 6. Psychosocial support** should be provided to members of the community. This is not easy in a community that has been under enormous stress, and in a culture in which psychosocial needs are not easily acknowledged. **Religious organisations can provide a safe space for community gatherings and exchanges.** There are also various promising initiatives to provide **easy access to psychosocial support** without being explicit about it. A regular, physical, easily accessible presence is key to such support, as it takes time to build trust. Psychological assistance should also be made accessible to people from the local community working at distribution points, as well as to local government employees.
- 7.** One of the major sources of conflict in de-occupied communities is the issue of **justice**, the basis of which is often perceived loyalty/disloyalty to the occupiers. Religious organisations that continued to work during occupation may have acquired social capital, enabling them to function as a bridge in the **restoration of social unity**. This is a complex process and beyond the scope of this policy brief. In all cases, justice requires the documentation of **war crimes** to continue and **justice** mechanisms and institutions to become operational.

*Unlike the previous phase and following phase, the transition phase does not sit neatly within international frameworks, such as that of NATO. This period of de-occupation can best be classified as the moment between FABN and the Contribution to a Safe and Secure Environment (C-SASE). This is because access to and the provision of essential goods and services continue to represent a primary area of focus, but the newly-liberated community is also beginning to return to some kind of normality, as it faces the challenge of re-establishing essential institutions and services critical to the creation of a safe and secure environment. Here the most important tasks of the military are:*

- Transferring authority back to democratically elected entities with regards to administering the newly-liberated community, as well as shifting from a supported to a supporting role with regards to local law enforcement structures, which should re-assume the lead role in re-establishing a safe and secure environment, with the military providing assistance when required. This requires careful planning, especially in terms of how to avoid conflicting chains of command and how to ensure adequate coordination between diverse stakeholders (i.e., political, law enforcement and military actors).*
- Appropriate indicators have to be identified well ahead of liberation operations in order to establish, as clearly as possible, which conditions need to be met for the transfer of authority from the Military Administration to elected decision makers.*
- Demining operations will continue in this phase, as will the clearing of compromised structures and the removal of rubble, if and when such capabilities are possessed by the in-place military force.*
- Military units could also be required to provide security for sensitive sites, particularly if stay-behind forces continue to be a threat. Humanitarian storage sites may also require additional security, to avoid looting from nefarious actors. By fulfilling such roles, the military frees up initially limited law enforcement assets, which can then be directed to more high-visibility tasks, including community policing, which supports the local population's perception of a return to normality.*

## Phase 3: Normalisation

*The third phase involves the normalisation of life in the community and entails **envisioning and building the future**. The aim is to fully recover both physically and socially, which can take years.*

Normalisation is a long-term process – usually five to ten years – and should involve the community in all its diversity, taking into account its **strengths and uniqueness**, resources and economic situation. It should be based on specific plans, which are, in turn, based on an **assessment of the needs and development prospects** of the community. These plans should be developed and implemented in an inclusive manner. It is important to manage **expectations about the speed of reconstruction**, including through constant public messaging.

- 1.** The **restoration of democratic practices and culture** should be continued and **local leaders supported**. This should ultimately result in the full restoration of democratic institutions and procedures and the full functioning of local self-government. The **transparency and accountability**

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of processes (including reconstruction) will **increase trust** among de-occupied communities and contribute to their development. Local leaders should be supported to form a **realistic vision of the economic situation** and prospects and the conditions needed to realise the community's economic potential. The **more people** involved in this, the greater the **legitimacy** and stability going forward.

- 2. Attracting support and resources** for community recovery, in accordance with the community's vision and specific plan. This is not only about state institutions and infrastructure, but about the entire range of possible services, including the labour market. The middle class can play a major role in this. In this phase, it is also important to work on the restoration of **human capital** and **economic infrastructure**. Companies and professionals from the community should be engaged in reconstruction and contracting should be clear and transparent. A community monitoring mechanism can help to ensure accountability, transparency, and reconstruction that is in line with the priorities of the community. **Access to education** should be provided at all levels, including adult education, e.g., through the provision of short professional courses to allow people to obtain certain skills and qualifications that are in demand, including for reconstruction. Humanitarian aid needs to stop at this point to allow the economy to develop without obstacles. This has to be done in an intelligent and coordinated manner to avoid creating vacuums.
- 3. Collective memory** should be recorded, including stories of occupation, resistance, and small-scale activism during occupation. This is a time to rethink the identity of the community and shape local memorialisation practices and places. Attention should be paid to documenting and researching the stories of people and the context they were in before the war, during occupation, and after liberation. This should include the narratives of those who left, as well as those who remained. The mechanics of the documentation processes can encompass a variety of mediums (from interviewing to rituals and exhibitions).
- 4.** A complex issue that requires separate attention and will need a tailored approach is the reintegration of **people who have collaborated** with the occupiers.
- 5.** Care must be taken regarding the **demobilisation and reintegration** of former combatants. This should include significant psychological support, structures for peer support, and facilitated access to employment opportunities. This is vital, as ex-combatants who are not reintegrated into society pose a significant risk if they become disenfranchised and disillusioned.

*In NATO terms, the process of long-term normalisation is most akin to the Alliance's C-SASE lens. This lens reflects efforts to build good governance structures and reinforce the rule of law, as well as the re-building of local capabilities and capacities in terms of economic development, the consolidation of local services, and addressing the threats to and drivers of sustainable peace and societal cohesion. By this phase, the transition from Military Administration to civilian authorities should be complete, with a minimal military footprint, excluding perhaps reserve units kept in the vicinity of the liberated area in order to respond to unexpected security challenges. As per the previous phase, the transition to a civil democratically elected administration should be pre-planned and executed through the use of key indicators that clearly define the pace and modality with which full transition should occur.*

### Contact details

#### AMES

Dmytro Zvonok  
[zvonokdo@gmail.com](mailto:zvonokdo@gmail.com)  
+38 0960777591

#### PAX headquarters, Utrecht

Jitske Hoogenboom  
[hoogenboom@paxforpeace.nl](mailto:hoogenboom@paxforpeace.nl)  
+31 6 53222713

#### PAX EU Liaison Office, Brussels

Wael Abdulshafi  
[w.abdulshafi@paxforpeace.nl](mailto:w.abdulshafi@paxforpeace.nl)  
+32 485 241 596

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